

LOVE'S SACRIFICE

written by
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FADE IN:

SUPER: WOODLEY PARK

EXT. HOSPITAL DAY

A slate sky matches the gray streets of DC. A steady cold rain falls on a large infirmary. Block letters on the entrance read: "CHILDREN'S NATIONAL MEDICAL CENTER"

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

ANDY ANSELL, 29, hurries along a corridor. Floor to ceiling white. Overhead the fluorescents make him look even paler than he is.

He has a pleasant face, the sort that tourists stop to ask directions from on the street, but the anger that flows in the veins just below the skin can transform it in an instant.

Andy quickens his pace and fumbles for his wallet. At the nurse's station he produces his drivers license. The nurse behind the counter frowns.

NURSE

Who are you here with?

ANDY

Oh I'm a volunteer. Sorry I'm late, I have a 10 o'clock shift in the oncology department.

NURSE

It's 10:15, we were just about to call-

ANDY

I know. I'm sorry I hit some bad traffic on 395.

NURSE

Let me page Lisa, she just started handing out toys. Did you soap up?

Andy reddens and hustles towards the Purell dispenser. He winces as the alcohol burns the red patchy skin on his hand. A tiny trickle of blood flows out of a small cut on his finger. Andy licks his finger and hustles down the corridor.

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT'S ROOM - SAME

LISA, late 30's, and soft from too many hours at the hospital, is dispensing books and small toys to JEREMY, 10, who is seated upright in the hospital bed. IV lines snake out of his arms and bind him like plastic chains.

Andy kneels down in the cramped room and grabs a stuffed animal from under the bed.

ANDY

Hey buddy, how you doing today?

JEREMY

Ok. The Nats won last night.

ANDY

Oh yeah? Did you see the game?

JEREMY

No but my daddy brought me a shirt signed by the team.

ANDY

That's awesome, can I see?

(to Lisa)

Sorry I'm late traffic was awful this morning.

LISA

No problem. Jeremy was asking about ya.

JEREMY

Andy, if it warms up a little next weekend, can you take me outside again and toss me the ball?

LISA

(to Andy)

He's been asking for that all week.

ANDY

Sure buddy, it's a little rainy today, but we could toss around in the cafeteria, if the nurses don't see us.

(winks)

Where's your mitt?

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - LATER

Andy shuffles out of the last patient room, spent but glowing.

He checks his phone, and sees two missed calls from Jennifer.

CHAPLAIN (O.S.)
Andy, how are you? Could I have a word?

The CHAPLAIN, 40's, is a kindly man, with thinning gray hair and tiny gold spectacles. Like a jeweler his actions and words are precise.

He catches up to Andy and shakes his hand.

ANDY
Uh sure Father, but I need to head out soon, I'm pretty beat.

CHAPLAIN
I noticed. Everything going ok?

ANDY
Yeah fine I guess. The job is keeping me busy...

ANDY (CONT'D)
Look Father-

CHAPLAIN
(raises hands)
I don't mean to pry, I just wanted to say hello.

ANDY
(rubs eyes)
It's just the pace of this place, it's wearing me down, I've been here seven years and I still don't feel like I belong. I can't find a decent date, and I can't seem to keep my morals and live at the same time.

The Chaplain leans on the wall and crosses his arms.

CHAPLAIN
We chatted a while back about a young lady you were seeing. She's out of the picture?

ANDY

Yeah. Didn't end well. As soon as she found out I was religious we drifted apart.

(beat)

Here's what I don't understand. God puts us on this earth right? Gives us all these crazy emotions and passions, all biologically based, and then he expects us to not act- to fight and resist our very natures? The nature he gave us. Sounds cruel to me. Like you starve a dog, then you beat him for going for the food you put in his bowl.

CHAPLAIN

Life isn't easy, especially in this city. But we're called to try and walk a higher path, to control ourselves. It's what sets us apart from the animals- from dogs.

ANDY

Sometimes I wish more than anything in the world, I could just be an atheist, or agnostic, or an "I just don't care. But I can't, and not a single girl in city gets me.

CHAPLAIN

(adjusts glasses)

Why do you come here?. There's lot of things you could do on a Saturday morning. What draws you?

Andy rubs nervously at a deep scar on his hand, and looks past the Chaplain.

ANDY

I promised when I got out, I would never forget the blessing that was given to me. The fact that I got to walk out of here basically unscathed. That I could go on with my life, and pick up the pieces. When I see these kids, I just want to give them something, some hope, because I know what's it like. They sense that.

(MORE)

ANDY (CONT'D)

And for just a moment if I can take their minds off what they're going through and toss them a ball, or read them a story, it makes their day a little bit easier, a little more normal.

CHAPLAIN

(nods)

Exactly. You're here because you feel something more than your own desires. That's the mystery of life, that when we give to others, we feel better than the greatest gifts we give ourselves.

Andy clears his throat and nods.

ANDY

Father, thanks for chatting, I gotta run. You've given me some things to think about.

CHAPLAIN

My doors always open if you want to chat more.

ANDY

Thanks.

EXT. WASHINGTON, DC - NIGHT

The monuments sparkle in the glow of dim streetlights surrounding the iconic National Park.

EXT. FOUNDING FARMERS EATERY - NIGHT

Inside the floor to ceiling glass windows the PATRONS crowd into the small waiting area, and at the adjacent bar. They are packed in like sardines in a glass jar.

A rainbow of races, genders, and social classes that make up Washington, all dressed conservatively in suits, of course.

INT. FOUNDING FARMERS - NIGHT

Andy sits at a small booth across from KATHY, 20's, a petite girl, with olive skin, and a hawk's beak of a nose.

KATHY

You mean to tell me you have never
been outside of the US?

She points her fork menacingly at Andy, as if jousting. Her
springy curls bounce as she talks.

ANDY

No, never. Unfortunately I was
supposed to study abroad in Egypt,
but the Arab spring erupted just
before I was about to head over.

KATHY

But seriously, not even to Canada,
or Mexico?

ANDY

Nope I'd like to though. Just
haven't had a chance yet.

KATHY

But you're almost thirty, that's
crazy!

Andy mutilates his overcooked catfish, with his fork.

ANDY

Yeah, I'd love to soon. I do a lot
of camping in the area. Hey-

KATHY

Ew, how about all the bugs. And no
showers?

ANDY

I guess that's kind of the point,
away from civilization, that kind
of thing...

KATHY

So, what was this you told me about
writing poetry?

ANDY

(brightens)

Yes! I actually brought a little
poem. I composed it based on your
profile. Wanna see?

Kathy hesitates, then nods reluctantly.

KATHY

Uh, sure.

Andy shyly slides a small piece of papers folded into the shape of a seal across the table. He quickly focuses on his plate. A smile begins to spread across Kathy's face, and splits into a grin as she unfolds the seal.

KATHY (CONT'D)
(laughing)
This is... a first.

A bead of sweat trickles down Andy's forehead. He quickly wipes it with the napkin. Suddenly, Kathy bursts out in laughter.

ANDY
What? Do you like it?

KATHY
I'm sorry this is just too much. I
gotta go- I'm sorry.

She gets up to leave, and knocks over her cup of red wine.

KATHY (CONT'D)
Shit. Really, I'm sorry.
Thanks for...for the
meal.

Andy stares past her to the bar, trying not to make eye contact. His face says it all, another failure. A group of GIRLS stare at him from the bar. He hurriedly grabs his phone and pretends to check it.

In the phones reflection he sees every bit of a long twenty-nine years etched in the lines, and imperfections on his face.

QUICK FLASHBACK

Andy lies in a hospital bed, staring blankly at the ceiling. Alone. Tired. Broken.

He glances at a small flip phone, looking at pictures of him and a beautiful young girl with black curly hair. He lets the phone slip from his hands, which are covered in IV marks and bruises. The phone clatters to the floor. Steel striking linoleum echoes in the silence.

BACK TO SCENE

The small slip of paper lies crumpled on the table, red wine creeping over the paper, swallowing up the white.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Andy hunches over his desk, in a cramped cube farm, scrawling words on a small notepad near his computer.

INSERT NOTEPAD

*She is the sapphire of women,
Perhaps I could find a bland diamond with better curves,
Or an even a ruby with finer symmetry,
Or an emerald with more luminescence,
But none of these would rival the pure sapphire of her eyes,
In comparison all else are but cheap shards of glass,
When I look into them, I drown in their endless Mediterranean
waters, they are like mirrors, reflecting back to me the
desires of my soul.*

BACK TO SCENE

BEN (O.S.)
Is that the status paper the boss
asked for?

BEN, 30's, stands behind Andy, craning to catch a glimpse.
He's stocky, with boyish good looks, and dimples that put you
at ease.

ANDY
Uh, no, just trying a different
tack.

BEN
Poetry? Lemme see!

Ben tries to snatch the notebook from Andy's grasp, but Andy
pins it to his chest protectively.

ANDY
Hands off, nothing you would
understand.

BEN
But my eyes, are Mediterranean
blue, wanna see?

ANDY
(laughs)
They're green man.

BEN

Don't let James see that. He's been on the warpath lately. He wants the policy papers over to Michelle three days ahead of schedule.

ANDY

Yeah. And the bill doesn't vote on the issue until Thursday.

BEN

(adjusts his neck)

So a date with blue eyes tonight?

ANDY

Yes sir.

BEN

Take it easy Shakespeare. If you open with the "reflecting the desires of your heart" line, you might see fear peering back at you. Seriously don't give her that?

ANDY

I have to set myself apart somehow in this shark's nest. I've tried everything, and at least with this
(holds up the paper)
I can actually enjoy myself even if the actual date is shit.

BEN

Just relax. Have fun, that'll set you apart in this town. And hey, maybe she'll know about healthcare reform, and can help us with this position paper...

Andy picks up his backpack and stuffs his laptop and some folders inside, and turns to go.

JAMES, 40's, a tall bulky man, well past his athletic peak but with the structure of a former D1 Ivy League rower, emerges from his office, and cuts off Andy's exit.

JAMES

(to Andy)

How's that paper coming?

ANDY

Sir I'm feeling a little under the weather. Is it ok if I get it to you first thing Monday?

James grimaces.

JAMES

I guess. It's a Friday. No later than noon Monday? We need to get it out before the vote.

ANDY

I'll be in this weekend to work on it.

JAMES

Thanks.

EXT. DC STREETS - DAY

DC humidity and blinding sun hit Andy as he fumbles for his sunglasses. His phone rings.

ANDY

Hey what's up Rachel?

RACHEL (V.O.)

I called you twice on Saturday, and left a message. No response.

ANDY

You really gotta learn how to text, I responded.

RACHEL (V.O.)

You know I hate texting. How's it going?

ANDY

Can't complain, work, sleep, life rolls on.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Any dates?

ANDY

Would you stop asking, I told you I'm on a break.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Just don't write them any poetry, wait till you get to know them-

ANDY

I'm not going on dates, relax.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Somebody's prickly today. Hey Mom keeps calling me. Would you at least give her a ring this weekend? She's worried.

ANDY

She doesn't wanna talk to me, she just feels guilty.

RACHEL

Give her a break, the split with Dad is still fresh...

ANDY

Not my problem. I got my own life out here. I got out of there because I didn't want to be in the drama.

RACHEL

I'm sick of it too, but you gotta check in with her, she's your Mom. Just give her a ring for me? Andy, are you there?

EXT. METRO STATION - DAY

Andy reaches the metro entrance and bounds down the escalator weaving through the line of tourists and tired workers.

INT. METRO STATION - SAME

ANDY

Alright, alright. I gotta go, need to catch the metro.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Hey. I love you. I'm proud of you.

ANDY

Thanks sis. I'll call you.

RACHEL (V.O.)

You better!

FLASHBACK - EXT. WASHINGTON DC, UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - NIGHT

A huge concrete building looms over a grassy park scattered with benches. A sign nearly obscured by trees reads: "George Washington University".

EXT. UNIVERSITY COURTYARD - NIGHT

A younger and fresh faced Andy, sits on a hard wooden bench, knees touching MELANIE ROSATI, 19. He is holding a small white carton of ice cream. He licks the spoon. Drops of white fall on the flagstones.

Melanie's oval face is lit by the pale moon overhead. Her dark eyes glint in the dusk, like deep wells. They search his face.

MELANIE

Why do you always get vanilla?

Andy puts the carton under the bench, and looks up at the stars.

ANDY

I dunno, always loved it. I never get anything else. Even as a kid...

MELANIE

Never any chocolate, or fruit, or-

ANDY

Nope. I'm boring.

(grins)

Look at the stars, they're so clear tonight, like a million tiny fires burning in the unending wilderness of the sky...

MELANIE

That's beautiful. I didn't know I was going on a date with a poet.

ANDY

Just a silly romantic. It feels so perfect tonight. It's almost like you can feel the last trace of summer fading into fall in the subtle bite of the wind.

MELANIE

(laughing softly)

Okay. It's bad enough that my sorority sisters saw you throwing pebbles at my window.

(MORE)

MELANIE (CONT'D)

If I tell them you were composing
poetry on our first date...
(reaches for his hand)
Why did you take so long to text
me?

ANDY

I lost your number.

MELANIE

Rightttt. Two day rule?

ANDY

No seriously. After the party, I
couldn't even remember my name the
next morning.

MELANIE

Yes you could, I was with you until
the sun rose, remember?

ANDY

Ah yes, and poor Chris stumbled in
on us sleeping in his bean bag
chair. He nearly fell over.

MELANIE

I think that was from the shots,
not us.

They both laugh. Andy takes her delicate hand and pulls her
in closer. He caresses her soft porcelain cheek.

Melanie's cheeks burn. Her emotions bubble just below the
surface, in danger of consuming her.

She takes a deep breath.

ANDY

I don't want this moment to end.
It's like I've waited my entire
life to meet you. Every bad date,
every time I've been stood up, it's
all led me here. With you.

Melanie opens to him like a flower blooming under the pale
moon, and nestles her head into Andy. Her long black hair
cascades down his back in springy curls.

MELANIE

Do you remember what I said at the
party?

ANDY

Hold me until the dawn. If you
don't let go, we can capture this
moment forever.

MELANIE

Kiss me.

Ever so gently, Andy tilts her chin to his mouth and tastes
her honey lips...

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - INT. METRO CAR - NIGHT

ANNOUNCER

NEXT STOP FOGGY BOTTOM, GEORGE
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

Andy sits up with a start. He looks around the compact metro
car, he's alone.

EXT. 51st State - NIGHT

MARY RACHEL III, walks into the bar just in front of Andy. He
has just enough time to see her supple figure pass thru the
oak doors of the two story brick dive. She's like an angel in
jeans. Pictures don't capture the wicked curves of her
sensuality.

INT. 51ST STATE - NIGHT

Andy enters the small dimly lit bar. Stained wooden floors,
tables crammed together. Mary seats herself at the far end
with her back to the wall, a full view of the entrance like
she's expecting a shootout.

Mary is in her late 20's and even more beautiful than her
photos. Even in the dark lighting her eyes sparkle
mischievously. Her chin is raised high in the manner of
Southern aristocracy. She flashes a guarded smile at Andy,
sizing him up.

ANDY

Sorry I'm a little late, looks like
you got here just in front of me-

MARY

To be honest, I was about one
minute from heading out.
Punctuality is one my biggest pet
peeves. I just got up to make sure
I was at the right place.

Andy freezes in the act of reaching for his wallet and looks into her brazen eyes.

ANDY

Look I'm only 10 minutes late. You could have ordered a drink on me, like I texted...

MARY

A lady, never buys herself a drink on the first date. A gentleman also usually doesn't suggest a bar like this.

(gestures around)

Down South-

ANDY

(irritated)

Look I'm sorry, let me get you a drink. This place used to be my old college hang out.

(to the bartender)

Hey can we get some drinks down here?

The bartender reluctantly pulls himself away from the baseball game on the overhead TV and waddles down.

BARTENDER

What'll it be?

ANDY

Coors Light, coldest you have

(nods to Mary)

And the lady will have?

MARY

Johnny Walker, Blue or Platinum if you have it.

BARTENDER

Uh, no, just the green and black.

MARY

(sighs)

Green will do I guess, on the rocks please.

Mary gets up and heads to the bathroom, she calls to Andy without turning around.

MARY (CONT'D)

Please watch my purse, I'm going to go freshen up.

ANDY
(below his breath)
Platinum? What the fuck have I
gotten myself into?

INT. BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Mary confidently struts back to her seat and smiles at Andy,
flashing perfect ivory teeth.

MARY
I figured you more for a scotch
drinker.

ANDY
Don't people drink beer down South?

MARY
Oh they do, just not people I
typically date.

ANDY
Ah, well girls I date usually don't
order a platinum Johnny Walker on
the rocks, but I guess there's a
first for everything?

MARY
Fair enough. It's a little more
common in my family.

Andy takes a long drink from his bottle, and nearly kills it.
His face says it all. Another failed meeting, another waste
of time.

ANDY
So, what part of Georgia are you
from exactly?

MARY
Just outside Savannah. This
beautiful little house down by the
river.

ANDY
Oh. Maybe I've seen it. I used to
row down there for winter training.

MARY
Yes! We do see rowers after the new
year. So y'all came down every
winter?

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

That must have been tough, being away from family for the holiday.

ANDY

It was ok I guess. I'm not really close with my parents, just my sister.

MARY

How come?

ANDY

My parents are getting a divorce I try to stay out of it all.

MARY

I'm sorry. But you were never close with your momma?

ANDY

Not really. My mom just got a new corporate counsel job in LA, and since then she hasn't had much time for anyone. I see my sister a few times a year tho. She's up in New York City.

MARY

That's too bad.

ANDY

My sis was always kinda like a Mom to me, we talk pretty often. How bout yourself, what brought you to Rome?

MARY

I work in Congress, actually.

ANDY

Oh. Neat, how's that, must be interesting especially now-

MARY

Let's avoid the work talk shall we? It's so very DC.

ANDY

Sorry. I'm just so fascinated with the machinations of the hill politics...

MARY

Let's skip the pleasantries, ok? I can go get bored by a hundred boys down on U Street or Clarendon, asking me how I like politics, and what's a Southern belle doing up in the big city... I was interested in you because you had a unique approach. I liked the poem you sent me, but frankly I'm not sure we are a good fit.

Andy's face turns a red hue. He throws back the last of drink and shifts to the edge of his seat, ready to leave.

ANDY

Look, I dunno what your expecting, but it sounds like you need to set your account for Glover Park only, I'm sure some of the Southern boys up there will show you a proper good time.

MARY

I'm not interested in all that. No bs, tell me about yourself!

ANDY

No bs? You're probably really wondering how big my dick is, and how much money I pull in. You're probably thinking hey this guy is interesting, but is he gonna be able to provide for my expensive top shelf whiskey tastes? Or maybe you don't care about money, because your family has it- so you're more interested in if I'm going to be able to play golf with daddy, and smoke cigars at the Country Club with the boys. I'll answer that for you right now. I won't. You probably don't even care about me or my family, your just interested in me because you think I might be different than all the other boring sycophants who probably strut around Congress all day, giving you a high ma'am, and looking at your big ass behind your back. You want to know something else? The whole Southern thing, is kinda tedious. So you went to Vanderbilt.

(MORE)

ANDY (CONT'D)

That doesn't make you interesting,
or original. I think something in
my poem hit home, because you want
little taste of something
different. Something that speaks
not to your eyes or your head, but
to your heart- maybe your soul.
You've been surrounded by the same
boring circles of trust fund babies
and future lawyers that you're
barely able to breathe. I think
deep down inside your drowning, and
reaching out for a life preserver,
a rescuer. It's not me I can tell
you now. I'm the last person who
can do any saving in this city

He gets up to leave, wallet in hand.

ANDY (CONT'D)

I think I'm gonna head out, this
clearly isn't what you expected,
and I'm not measuring up.
(reaches into his pocket)
Here's your poem.

Andy places a small piece of blue paper on the bar, neatly
folded into the shape of an origami crane.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Do me a favor, just toss it. Or
hey, set it on fire, doused in some
Southern whiskey. I don't care.

He walks to the bartender and hands him his credit card. He
doesn't look back.

Mary starts a soft clap, and then increases the volume until
it echoes around the nearly empty bar. Several patrons glance
up, curious.

MARY

Bravo. Now that is what I wanted
from the start.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Andy lies in a huge king sized bed, with an ornate wooden
headboard. He is surrounded by luxury. Velvet drapes surround
the ornate windows. Beautiful paintings adorn the walls.

He studies himself in a huge floor to ceiling mirror of carved ebony adjacent to the closet. On the bedside table is a used condom, next to the unfolded crane.

Mary returns from the bathroom, and leaps into bed. She kisses Andy hard on the mouth.

MARY

You see? Now wasn't that more fun
than talking about my job?

ANDY

(grins)
You might say that.

Andy rolls over and kisses her on her on the back of her neck. He works his way down -little kisses, all the way down to the small of her back. His lips react to every movement of her body.

MARY

Ooooh. I'm sorry about being so
harsh earlier. I just get so
frustrated with this town
sometimes. All the guys hitting on
me, with their fake smiles. No one
has ever really talked to me
directly like that before. That was
real.

ANDY

Well, you kinda pushed me to it.
You acted like you hated me.

MARY

(smiles)
Obviously not.

Mary rolls over grabs the paper and gazes at it, thoughtfully.

MARY (CONT'D)

Where did you learn to write like
this?

ANDY

Hell.

MARY

What?

ANDY

I was in the hospital about 80% of
my childhood. In and out.

(MORE)

ANDY (CONT'D)

I saw more doctors than friends.
The only escape was my books, and
writing.

MARY

Wow, I'm sorry. What was wrong?

She nestles her head into Andy's chest.

ANDY

I was premature, so I had a lot of
health problems. My Mom also had me
when she was nearly 50, so I had
some pretty serious issues. Not to
get too deep, but I guess it's too
late for that.

MARY

And the writing comes from the
books?

ANDY

Yes, from my childhood imagination.
I just see something in front of me
like it's really there. When I was
lying in bed, alone, and sick, I
would comfort myself by traveling
to other places. Places where I had
friends, and I was healthy. Fit.

(runs his hand through his
hair)

And of course I always had a
beautiful girl with me on the
island or whatever.

MARY

Well what about me? How do I stack
up to the fantasy?

ANDY

Oh, I don't think even my
imagination could have dreamed a
woman like you. So you like the
poetry, how was the...rest?

MARY

(punches him playfully)

Are you always this needy?

ANDY

Hey, I just like to know I did my
job well.

MARY

I think you could hear that. Yes,
it was wonderful. I never do this.

ANDY

Me neither.

INT. APARTMENT -BEDROOM -LATER THAT NIGHT,

Andy slips out of the elegant bed, and tiptoes to his clothes, trying not to wake Mary, who is sleeping peacefully. Her face is serene, without a care in the world.

In the corner he sees a strange tapestry sketch of several women kneeling around a huge tree with a strange circular symbol emblazoned in the center - like snakes wound around each other in a knot.

He dresses hurriedly. SMACK. He stubs his toe hard on the night stand.

ANDY

(under his breath)
Son of a bitch.

Mary stirs, and stretches.

MARY

Where you going?

ANDY

I have to get back, finish up some
things at the office.

MARY

(yawning)
But it's Saturday...

ANDY

Yeah, working on a big paper.
Actually for your side of the hill!

MARY

Oh? You work in a lobbying firm?

ANDY

Yep. Just see it from the outside
tho, none of the inner workings.

Andy grabs his coat from the floor and tucks it under his arm, inching closer to the door.

MARY

So you know I have this three date rule... past three I turn into a pumpkin and disappear.

ANDY

Oh?

MARY

Yeah just something I picked up here to avoid getting too close to anyone.

ANDY

Okay. Well, we better make use of our time then. Can we stretch dates out over days?

MARY

Hmmm. Haven't thought of that. I'll have to consult my book.

ANDY

What book?

MARY

Oh just an old book that has some interesting bits of wisdom in it. Hey, I'm tired, I'm going to go back to sleep, it was so lovely meeting you Mr. Ansell.

Andy hesitates for an instance, the briefest moment in time, unsure of what he wants. Then he crosses over to Mary and kisses her gingerly on the forehead.

ANDY

I had a wonderful time. I hope you don't feel like we jumped in too fast. I'd love to see you again.

MARY

I'd like that.

EXT. ROCK CREEK PARK - DAY

Andy's breath condenses into mist in the crisp fall air. His arms pump, as he lengthens his stride trying to keep up with Mary.

ANDY

(panting)

Damn. Slow down! How often do you come out here?

MARY

Everyday, save Sunday if I can get out.

They round a bend in the gravel path, surrounded by a dense forest aflame with colors: burnt orange, gold, fiery red, pale yellow.

Mary slackens her pace and stops near a huge oak tree. Andy collapses at her feet.

ANDY

Whew. I guess I was a little more out of shape than I thought.

MARY

(laughs)

I think you had a little too much to drink last night.

ANDY

Well you boss kept buying shots for the group, I didn't want to be rude.

MARY

Warren? You gotta learn that you will never keep up with him, he's infamous on the Hill.

ANDY

Thanks for warning me last night!

MARY

I tried hun.

Mary offers her hand, but Andy pulls her down into the grass playfully. They roll around, until Andy sits on top of her and kisses her for a long moment.

ANDY

All of a sudden I have all this energy. Want to grab a late lunch and head back to your place?

MARY

Can't. Remember I have to meet my sorority group tonight, I need to get ready.

ANDY

Sorority group? I thought they were just for students?

MARY

Alumni meeting.

ANDY

Ah. Well we haven't grabbed a meal out in a while. Maybe you are getting tired of me?

MARY

Stop. You would still be asleep if I hadn't woken you with some of my famous Georgia coffee.

ANDY

(southern drawl)

And thank Gawd you did. You ma'am are a lady of many talents.

MARY

(winks)

You haven't scratched the surface mister.

Mary gets up and starts to stretch.

ANDY

Hey what's the deal with that tree picture in your room? With the symbol on it?

MARY

That's something I picked up at Yale. It's a Druid symbol for strength and the eternity of the soul.

ANDY

Wow, that's interesting. Druid? Like Merlin?

MARY

(laughs)

No much deeper than that.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

The Druids and Druidesses ruled Britain long before the Romans showed up, or Christianity. In pop culture it's just the men that are portrayed, but there were really a lot of women who were the caretakers of the religion too.

ANDY

Interesting. Here I thought you were Southern Baptist.

MARY

Well, you never asked. The druidesses were the ones tasked with taking care of the sacred groves, or Nemeton as they were known. I can show you some of their writings some time, very fascinating. Hey we better get back. Race you to the car?

Mary sprints through the trees, and leaves Andy with a puzzled look on his face as he gets to his feet.

INT. ANDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Andy lounges on an old beat up couch that looks like it was either retrieved from a back alley or purchased in the 90's. A football game is blaring in the background.

He checks his phone every few minutes, tossing it up in the air and catches. He texts Mary.

INSERT PHONE:

If your event doesn't get out too late- want to try and catch a movie tonight? Love to see you.

BACK TO SCENE

Andy gets up from the couch, and checks his phone. No answer. He putters around his small apartment, picking up laundry and trash. It's a mess. He gives up the attempt and grabs his keys, and his leather jacket.

EXT. MARY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

Andy walks with his hands stuffed deep into his pockets. The thin cowhide coat is little protection against the bitter chill. He walks towards the main entrance then FREEZES.

Mary, dressed in a long black dress, and a bulky fur coat hurries out of the main entrance talking quickly on the phone. She carries a huge black trash bag, struggling with its heft.

Andy raises his hand to hail her, but stops as a black Suburban pulls to the curb and three WOMEN, also similarly dressed get out and help Mary with the bag. Mary gets in the car and it drives away from Andy.

ANDY
(mumbles)
The fuck?

Curious, Andy looks around quickly and spots a row of share bikes. He quickly punches in his member code, and hops on the closest one with sticky handlebars.

ANDY (CONT'D)
(grimaces)
I always pick the best ones.

EXT. STREETS OF DC, MOVING - NIGHT

The Suburban is stopped at a light, just visible two blocks away. Andy pedals hard to catch up, weaving in and out of stopped cars. A driver honks at Andy, but he speeds up and stands on the pedals.

He follows the Suburban through the busy DC night traffic, pumping his legs to stay just within sight

The SUV stops at the entrance to Rock Creek, and seven women, all clad in the same dark attire, and carrying black bags, get out and head into the gloom of the forest.

EXT. ROCK CREEK PARK- NIGHT

Andy clicks on his phone, and texts Ben.

INSERT PHONE:

ANDY: Your not gonna believe this I am following this chick into Rock Creek she's with this group of women all dressed in black. They all got into this SUV and are carrying some weird shit in trash-bags

BEN: Who??? Why are you following?

ANDY: This girl Mary I've been dating for a bit.

BACK TO SCENE

Andy props the bike on a tree, and carefully follows the sound of voices into the blackness. He can't see their shapes, but he hears their low voices.

He calls Ben.

ANDY
(whispers)
Your not going to believe this,
it's some ritual shit out of a
horror movie.

BEN
Dude, sounds shady as fuck. Is this
the chick you had a date with a few
weeks ago.

ANDY
Yeah and the poetry fucking worked
bro. I told you.

BEN
Yeah but she sounds like she is in
some weird shit. You better get out
of there.

ANDY
No I need to find out what the hell
this is. Call police if don't text
by midnight. I gotta go.

BEN
Alright man, be careful...

EXT. DEEP FOREST - NIGHT

Andy carefully follows the voices on a narrow trail, cautious and alert.

A LAUGH bursts out from up ahead, and loud SHOUTS and GREETINGS. Andy creeps up to a clearing in the trees, and drops to his knees, crawling forward.

A flame suddenly jumps up in the darkness, and a circle of FIGURES, all clad in black, are suddenly visible in the inky darkness, gathering around a small bonfire ringed by skulls. The dark figures link hands and begin to move around the fire as one, picking up speed.

The figures begin to chant in a strange language, as the firelight plays tricks on Andy's eyes.

The light dances at strange angles, showing only parts of faces.

A hand is visible with a gold watch, then it suddenly vanishes. A nose and part of a chanting mouth appear, then vanish again.

A TALL FIGURE, clad in a black dress, and an animal fur coat raises her hand adorned glinting with many rings. The group immediately goes silent. The only sound is the distant murmur of traffic. The forest is DEAD SILENT, as if holding its breath, waiting to her to speak.

TALL FIGURE

Tonight we have a new member into our coven. Tiffany, Sarah, would you please grab the sacrificial offering? Mary Rachel III, please stand and remove your clothes.

Andy gapes as Mary obediently moves near the fire, and slowly undresses. The orange light dances off the canvas of her pale skin.

One of the dark figures removes her hood, and takes a small knife out of her cloak. She reaches into one of the bags, and pulls out a limp rooster.

The tall figure grabs the rooster by the neck, and with a quick violent motion she severs the neck. Blood spurts everywhere as the chant begins anew.

TALL FIGURE (CONT'D)

(over the chanting)

Mary Rachel, I anoint you with the blood of this sacrifice into our order, do you submit to our laws? Do you protect the sacred grove, and the earth around us? Have you taken the oath?

MARY

I have.

The tall figure raises the decapitated chicken, still spurting blood from its neck, and douses Mary with steaming red liquid. She raises the knife to Mary's throat.

TALL FIGURE

Do you-

ANDY

NO!

Andy rushes the circle, and raises his hands up.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Mary run!

TALL FIGURE

How dare you enter the sacred
circle! No man may come near us
during the sacred hour!

MARY

What the fuck are you doing here?

The black clad women closest to Andy pull knives out of their
cloaks and advance towards him.

ANDY

Mary tell them to back off, I'm
with you!

MARY

I don't know this man, he must have
followed from my apartment.

ANDY

Mary, for fucks sake!

As one, the thirteen women rush Andy. Terrified, he runs
right through the fire, knocking over a bucket of chicken
blood and guts, which splashes over him.

With a CRUNCH he stumbles and falls on something, and looks
down in horror at a broken skull fragment. A woman gropes for
him but he kicks back hard, hitting her in the face. She
screams in fury.

TALL FIGURE

Get him! He must not escape!

For his life, Andy crashes into the underbrush and runs with
everything inside of him. The women are not far behind, but
their heavy dresses and coats slow their speed.

EXT. ROCK CREEK PARKWAY - NIGHT

Andy reaches the road. A car nearly ends his life, but it
swerves, horn blaring, and Andy crosses out of the park,
wheezing.

EXT. CONNECTICUT AVE. OUTSIDE POLITICS AND PROSE

Andy stumbles down the sidewalk in utter shock. He looks like
an extra from a slasher movie, completely drenched in red.

His pants are torn, and one knee is bleeding profusely. Bits of chicken guts stick to his shirt and pants.

Leaves and small tree branches cover his tangled hair. He reaches into his pocket for his phone in a daze, but it's not there.

James, is standing smoking with a GROUP outside of the bookstore. He looks up and spots Andy.

JAMES

Andy? Is that you?

Andy stops and his face turns a shade paler than it already is.

ANDY

Uh, I just got out of a heck of an after party for this play-

JAMES

Holy shit son, you look like you've been stabbed. Do you need go to the hospital?

ANDY

No, I'm ok really. I just lost my phone. Could I borrow yours to call a taxi?

The group of MEN and WOMEN outside stare in amazement at Andy.

JAMES

Are you sure you're ok?

ANDY

Yeah. Just a rough night. Dating in this town is a bloodbath.

Everyone laughs a little too hard. DEMI, 20's, in pigtails and a pink Matrix style trench coat calls out from the group. Her breasts swell out of her low cut blouse.

DEMI

You can fucking say that again. Dating in this town is murder. Hey cool costume, where you in a play or something?

ANDY

Uh...yeah. Local production in the park.

WOMAN
(smiles)
Cool, I'm Demi.

ANDY
Nice to meet you. I'm Andy.

JAMES
Let's all get a drink, been a long
fucking week.

Andy pulls a twig out of his hair and joins the group.

FADE OUT.